The Historical Wartime Context and Its Influence

Literary movements of the early nineteenth century were undeniably, at least to some extent, defined by a backdrop of wartime context. It was a time period not only caught up in the midst of the Napoleonic War, but also still suffering from the aftermath of the American Revolution. Certain texts from the time period offer relevant and explicit commentaries on war; Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*[1] and Walter Scott's *Waverley*[2] serves as key examples. The former offers an account of personal reflection on war whilst the latter focusses on a historic conflict of the mid eighteenth century. However, along with these more obvious treatments of war there are those which, although initially appearing to be largely uncolored by these conflicts, are actually deeply embued with wartime subtext. Jane Austen's novels, namely *Pride and Prejudice*[3] and *Mansfield Park*[4] serve as key instances of such novels, as they focus on characters who retain separation from the disruption, but are repeatedly unable to escape the permeating ripples of the war that surrounds them.

One of the more self-evident depictions of war within early nineteenth century literature appears in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, written in a time period that spanned the latter part of the Napoleonic War as well as its aftermath. Byron's most apparent comment on war throughout the poem is one which denounces the glorification of battle in favor of more grim allusions to its horror. Agustin Coletes-Blanco aligns himself with this view as he suggests that "*Child Harold* was an avowedly anti-war poem which denounced the absurdity of all conflicts, and in this sense it was revolutionary: creating an uncomfortable dissonance at variance with what was an already large corpus of Peninsular War poetry categorized by sharing and fostering, almost unanimously, the Establishment position"[5]. Indeed, Byron continuously hints at the cost of victory, and seems each time to resolve that this cost is substantially higher than its worth. The seventeenth stanza of the third canto opens with a line borrowed from Juvenal's tenth satire: "Stop – for thy tread is on an Empire's dust!"[6]. The "Empire" in question seems at first to allude to one of the great ancient empires of Rome or Greece, due to its present status as "dust". However, the "Empire" referenced is actually that of Napoleon Bonaparte, with this "dust" having been created only a short time beforehand as this particular stanza was written just a year after the definitive end of the Napoleonic War at the Battle of Waterloo. In creating this confusion, Byron refuses to acknowledge any distinction between the conflicts of his present day and any other conflicts in the history of man. The absurdity of which Coletes-Blanco speaks is particularly evident here, as the "tread" of Great Britain's victory march is centered on the metaphorical "dust" alluding to the destruction of a once great, and now wasted, empire. Byron utilizes the image of blood flowing; the first canto refers to a "bleeding stream"[7] as the narrator makes passage from Portugal to Spain. The stream in question alludes to the river Guadiana, whose current joins the Iberian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean, which in turn opens

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links to Britain, America and France. This is significant, as Byron selects a body of water which is not only the site of a historical battle, but that also serves as a geographical link to the key belligerents of his present. The links forged by Byron run deeper than geography as the continuity and the repetition of the stream's motion allude to the passage of time, whilst the blood symbolizes the violence of armed conflict. Subsequently, Byron suggests that the "Moor and Knight"[8] that once marched on the Iberian Peninsula have much in common with the Napoleonic and British soldiers[9]. The implication here is that wartime technology may evolve, with the "Knight" on horseback giving way to the rifle wielding soldier, but the universal spirit of conflict within human kind endures. In alignment with the prevalent anti-war sentiments occurring throughout the poem, the "bleeding" nature of Byron's imagery ensures that his past and present links are not read a glorious, but are instead read as tragic.

Another of the more obvious treatments of war and conflict within early nineteenth century literature occurs in Walter Scott's *Waverly*[10]. On the surface, it is a historical novel centered on the Jacobite rising of 1745, a conflict which occurred over half a decade before the publication of Scott's novel. Throughout *Waverley,* Scott offers a commentary on this particular conflict by the use of his eponymous hero, who acts as a vessel for his contemplations. Indeed, Waverley is a man who experiences both sets of belligerents first hand, and 'wavers' between their causes. His loyalties to his government and to his Whig father are countered by his sympathies to the Jacobite cause instilled into him by his uncle. Therefore, Edward Waverley is the ideal character through which to discuss themes such as conflict and tolerance as they relate to the Jacobite rising. However, although Scott's novel directly portrays a conflict of the past, it can be argued that there is some degree of affiliation between the wars of *Waverley*'s historic setting and the wars of *Waverly*'s present day. Indeed, Scott's resolution to depict a conflict of the past during a conflict of the present is certainly significant; to scrutinize the novel through this lens is to incorporate a much wider scope of analysis. When read in light of this notion, Scott's commentary on war throughout *Waverley* is embued with far more profound suggestions regarding human conflict in general, as opposed to simply representing that which occurred between the Jacobites and the Hanoverian Government. In this sense, Scott utilizes the past as means by which to examine and comment on the present. Crucially, Great Britain at the time of *Waverley*'s publication was not simply in a state of war, but was rather marred by the effects of multiple conflicts with the rise of Napoleon allowing for little time to recover from the American Revolution of the late eighteenth century. The selection of the Jacobite Uprising as the lens for this critique is notable in itself. Occurring in the mid eighteenth century, it was previous enough to be considered a subject of history, without being so previous as to be rendered unrelatable to an early nineteenth century audience. According to Georg Lukacs, "If experiences such as this are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual".[11] The implication of Lukacs suggestion is that the relatively short

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spacing between the Jacobite Uprising portrayed in the novel, and the Napoleonic Wars of the novels present day together with the American Revolution, colors the period as one of multiple and interlinked conflicts which together created a profound movement of worldwide change. The alternate title of the novel, *Tis Sixty Years Since*, strengthens this notion, as it references the present in relation to this near past and suggests that the events set in motion sixty years prior are still in motion at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Waverley is, in its most obvious analysis, a novel that uses a war that occurred in its own recent history as a case study for all aspects of war in general. It is neither wholly anti-war nor wholly pro-war, but rather an exploration of both sides. The eventual pardoning of Edward Waverley highlights the meaninglessness of organized conflict and puts Scott in some alignment with Byron's negative attitude towards war; Mac-Ivor, as a 'foreigner', is condemned to death whilst Waverley is entirely pardoned despite his pursuit of the same efforts. It could be argued that this acts as a comment intended to denounce war, as inherent prejudices against outsiders masquerade as the genuine pursuit of ideological intentions. To this extent, *Waverley* can be read as a lesson in the practice of tolerance as an alternative to conflict. However, this negativity is delivered alongside a subtler yet prevalent sense of hope, which becomes evident during the aforementioned practice of using the setting's past as a means by which to examine the novel's present. *Waverley* depicts Great Britain as a divided nation, a depiction which accurately represents the nation's history. However, the conflicts across Great Britain appearing in Scott's novel had healed by the time of its publication, with it standing as a united nation against Napoleon's forces. Subsequently, there arises the suggestion that conflict can be entirely overcome, perhaps even leaving a stronger nation in its wake. The final defeat of the Jacobite cause, both in historical fact and in Scott's fiction, signals the reunification of Britain under the Hanoverian government; this unified Britain would eventually gain victory in the Napoleonic Wars, an event which defined the early nineteenth century. Waverley's pardoning, together with his marriage to the peaceful and reserved Rose as opposed to the passionate revolutionary, Flora, alludes to a new found cooperation arising from shadow of war. Indeed, Rose possesses the capability for compromise which is so lacking in Flora. This notion stands in contrast to the absurd nature of war conveyed in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as it is shown to hold more a more positive outcome than simply reducing each other to "dust". Lukacs returns to the aforementioned idea of conflict surpassing time and location in its adherence to the consistency of human nature, but in relation to *Waverley* as opposed to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. However, he suggests that history and humanity are fundamentally intertwined rather than either factor dominating the other, as he argues that "this is no otherworldly fate divorced from men; it is the complex interaction of concrete historical circumstances in their process of transformation, in their interaction with concrete human beings, who have grown up in these circumstances, have been very variously influenced by them, and who act in an individual way according to their personal passions"[12]. From this, it can be deduced that for Lukacs, certain events of history, and more specifically war, are phenomenon which cannot be

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broken away from from until humanity's responses to particular circumstances diverge away from the incitement of conflict.

Amongst Scott and Byron's comments on the wider scope of war, both can be seen to adhere to what is perhaps the most significant diversion of the early nineteenth century literary movement in its relation to the theme of war: the rising trend of depicting the impact of wartime disruption on the individual. Neil Ramsey comments on this transition as he states that "Combined with the emergence of sentimental literature in the late eighteenth century, with its interest in the inner experience of ordinary people, a new kind of historical sensibility was taking shape. History was no longer viewed simply as the exploits of great men, but was defined as something in which ordinary individuals could participate"[13]. The adherence to this transition is of a more obvious nature in Byron's text, right down to his selected title. Indeed, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* implements the individual identification of the main character by name, whilst simultaneously making reference to a physical journey of personal and spiritual development. By utilizing a narrative which is not only first person, but delivered as a direct product of the narrator's own thoughts and feelings, Byron's poem appears as a journalistic travelogue of sorts. Consequently, the entire text revolves around the toll of national conflict on one man, as he seeks to escape the shadow of war via the practice of traveling. It is often suggested that the character of Childe Harold serves as a proxy for Byron himself; this notion intensifies the theme of war and the individual as he publicly pushes his personal thoughts about war at a time of substantial national conflict. Simon Bainbridge suggests that the conveyance of the significant individual is achieved through Byron's use of an additional elegiac verse, added to the first canto during its revision, and dedicated to his late friend John Wingfield. According to Bainbridge, "In his elegy for Wingfield, Byron reclaims the [elegiac] form from its uses for 'the boasted slain', emphasizing the effect of one individual loss and act of remembrance over the anonymizing tributes of official culture"[14]. It is notable that John Wingfield was not a wartime casualty, but rather succumbed to a fever shortly before Byron's completion of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.* It is therefore tempting to argue that Byron's dedication to him may be subject to diminished relevancy to the treatment of the individual in relation to war. However, its relevancy springs from the reflection on personal loss, and its juxtaposition against the masses of wartime loss. The latter can, in line with Bainbridge's view, become anonymized by its scale. By implicating his elegy for Wingfield, Byron effectively reminds the reader of the significance of each and every one of those human losses, and their equal importance to those occurring outside of a war setting.

This sense of a shift towards the individual at war can also be observed in *Waverley*. The focus is certainly subtler here, but this diminished obviousness by no means renders it absent. George Lukacs, in his notable criticism of Walter Scott's rendering of the historical novel, argues that "What matters in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we

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should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality"[15]. Indeed, Scott's attention to the individual figure within the context of war encompasses the implication of moral ramifications. In Scott's envisioning, he presents a kind of wartime horror which, although smaller in scale, is perhaps more deeply profound than a depiction of mass horror; the psychological impact on the individual. Kathryn Sutherland adheres to this notion as she insists that "After all the excuses and justification, Waverley has blood on his hands. Among the novel's most powerful scenes are those that confront the moral enormity of civil conflict at the individual level"[16]. Scott further explores these individual moral implications of war as he considers the struggle of soldiers to reconcile their personal beliefs with the necessities of duty. The surname of the eponymous protagonist Waverley alludes to his redirection of loyalties. Indeed, as discussed previously, there is an internal conflict between his loyalty to his government and his sympathy to the Jacobite cause. Having been raised under the influence of his uncle's Jacobean loyalties, his reluctance to aid in the quelling of their rising seems inevitable. His decision to abandon his posting in the Hanoverian army and to defer to the opposition raises important questions regarding the motivations and beliefs of the individual soldier. Scott seems to suggest that the collective ambitions of a belligerent nation do not necessarily correlate with those of each man enlisted, and highlights the difficulties this poses to an individual who must betray one or other side of their identity. As Scott traces the journey of Waverley, there is a distinct focus on his emotional motives as opposed to his ideological ones, which mirrors the personal 'pilgrimage' on which Childe Harold embarks in Byron's poem. Certainly, Waverley goes on his own journey during which his beliefs are explored and his loyalties are tested. As he becomes familiarized with the ways of the Jacobites and the rugged beauty of the Highlands, his own belief system adapts in a way that supersedes the official outlook of his nation.

It is tempting to argue that beyond the scope of works which, like that of Byron and Scott, set their literary worlds against the context of national unrest, much of early nineteenth century literature was far more concerned with the insular lives of civilians than with the subject of war. The works of Jane Austen may appear to staunchly encapsulate this notion, as her novels have been widely accused of lacking awareness to the nationally detrimental effects of the time period's consecutively occurring wars. Indeed, the settings of her novels revolve around the landed gentry, romance and unspoiled rural communities; it is an imagining which can be seen as being somewhat out of touch with reality. However, this very absence of 'reality' is what hints at the period of conflict from which Austen's novels emerged; it can be argued that they offer a form of literary escapism in reaction to traumatic events. Indeed, when juxtaposed against the disillusionment and uncertainty of the American Revolution, the settings of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* offer an image that is refreshingly removed from the difficulties of early nineteenth century society. This is not to say that military affairs are entirely ignored, but they are often portrayed in an idealistic and romantic manner. *Pride and Prejudice* epitomizes this kind of portrayal, as the female characters Lydia, Mrs. Bennett and Kitty all display an open

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attraction to soldiers; in this sense, the soldier appears largely as a romantic figure, and an object of desire. This is evident as the Austen describes Lydia's imagining of a military camp: "she saw all the glories of the camp – its tents stretched forth in beauteous uniformity of lines, crowded with the young and the gay, and dazzling with scarlet"[17]. Here, the figure of the soldier is undeniably glossed over as any signs of battle-weariness and trauma are engulfed by her envisioning of a perfectly romantic and regimental 'hero'. However, although Austen's texts do feature a significant degree of this literary whitewashing, more negative treatments of the themes of war and conflict also manage to penetrate her insular settings. They do so in a multitude of subtly self-evident ways, as the ripples of conflict reach even the most disconnected and rural communities. Robert Morrison disputes the notion of what Kaelyn Caldwell calls a "backdrop of pastoral peace"[18], as he argues that "Austen is an author of remarkable range and force who did confront some of the central conflicts of her age, and who in *Pride and Prejudice* combines provincial preoccupations and the intricacies of courtship with an incisive and thoroughgoing response to a series of revolutionary anxieties and pressure points"[19].

As an envisioning of the more indirect shockwaves of war, Austen pays subtle yet close attention to the individual; in this sense, she aligns herself with the works of Byron and Scott. Roberts underpins the individual impact of the Napoleonic War on Fanny Price, the heroine of Mansfield Park, as he states that "This background of gloom is the condition leading to Fanny's departure for Mansfield Park, and it helps explain the pale, timid, shy and sad girl who appeared at her aunt's estate"[20]. Indeed, the severe injury of Fanny's father during his service in the military acts as the root cause of the Price family's hardship; this, in turn, is the main contributor to the decision of Fanny's mother to send her to be raised by her wealthier relatives at Mansfield Park. This decision drastically alters the course of Fanny's future and, subsequently, there arises a suggestion that war significantly impacts each individual, whether or not they experience it first-hand, whilst recalling Ramsey's comment on the "interest in the inner experience of ordinary people"[21] which helped to shape literature of the early nineteenth century. Fanny's brother, William, as the most prominent of those characters who have actively participated in battle, serves as the novel's main source of war influence. However, the novel divulges only what William offers in his renditions of his experiences, and these are largely glorified as they are delivered in the form of adventure tales. It is only by connecting the dots of Fanny's backstory that the impact of war on her own situation becomes evident. Interestingly, her individual story of war holds far more basis in reality than William's, and yet it is never explicitly outlined. This can be seen to imply that the previously referenced "anonymizing tributes of official culture"[22] of which Bainbridge speaks, such as the glorified war stories of William, must be bypassed in order to recognize the often overlooked participations of each individual at war.

Although the theme of war is certainly prominent within Austen's work, her primary focus falls to an alternative form of conflict: personal conflict. This is predominantly conveyed through the

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characters of Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy who become entangled in their own war due to their conflicting personalities. When read in light of the novel's backdrop of war, this portrayal of personal conflict takes on a greater significance as it appears to interact with Austen's commentary on war. Indeed, Darcy and Elizabeth possess opposing values and, much like the belligerent nations of any war, this becomes a source of active conflict. Perhaps, Austen is trying to convey a sense that the predisposition to conflict is one which is imbedded within human nature and, from this view, war has little distinction from any other occurrence of conflict, with the exception of scale. The eventual union of the rivaling protagonists can be seen to hold a subtle message with regards to war: differences, when supplemented with tolerance, can result in something greater than war. It can be deemed that Darcy and Elizabeth do not overcome their conflict and then fall in love, but rather fall in love as a result of this conflict. Jibesh Bhattacharyya underpins this sense of unifying conflict as he states that "It is interesting to note that Darcy and Elizabeth become attracted to each other almost as soon as the conflict between pride and prejudice begins…it is this conflict or psychological tension that paves the way to their final union" [23]. For Bhattacharyya, Austen's conflict is more than merely a source of attraction, it also serves as a means of character refinement, supplementing character deficiencies and counterbalancing unfavorable traits. Indeed, he suggests that "Darcy's gentlemanly qualities, civil manners, and warmth of love conquer the prejudice of Elizabeth against him. And Darcy's pride is also humbled by Elizabeth's strength of character, intelligence and personality"[24]. Therefore, parallels can be drawn with *Waverley,* and the aforementioned suggestion of the unifying nature of conflict and, together, Austen and Scott discuss this notion with regards to two different conflicts of of two opposing scales: national and personal.

A persistent theme throughout the works of Austen, Byron and Scott is the importance of art and the creative mind in response to both wartime and personal conflict. Warren Roberts consolidates the aforementioned ideas of wartime individuality within *Mansfield Park*, with this idea that the creative mind can serve as a means by which to express that which cannot be expressed directly: the reality of war. He states that "When William returned to England on furlough he brought stories of the war to the insular world of *Mansfield Park.* In working out this part of the novel Austen did not focus attention on the war, but on the responses of various characters to William's stories"[25]. Indeed, it is interesting to note that William's stories are an instance of a fiction within a fiction, with both layers possessing a backdrop of the real-life Napoleonic War. In many ways, they are a continuation of Austen's tendency to whitewash the realities of this war, and in a wider context, war in general. William's stories of his time in the Navy are adventurous and incite a response of jealousy in Henry, who has not experienced the war first hand. In alignment with Roberts's suggestion, reactions such as these stand at odds with the more expected responses of pity or horror. Although William's stories are reminiscent of Lydia's romantic envisioning of the military in *Pride and Prejudice*, the former can be attributed to simple naivety, while William, as a first hand participant in the war effort, appears to

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be rewriting his own experiences. Therefore, creative fiction appears as a healing mechanism of sorts, with William managing to communicate his experiences at war without having to relive the harsh truths of them. The importance of creativity as a means of healing and expression can also be observed in *Waverley*. Sutherland epitomizes this notion as she asserts that “for those who survive battle, art can form part of the cure”[26]. The “cure” for Waverley comes in the form of a “spirited painting”[27] which appears in his house near the end of the novel is a different medium of creativity to William Price’s war tales, but their natures are aligned. Indeed, Fergus McIvor and Waverley appear side by side, set against the rugged natural beauty of the Highlands; it may not be a complete fiction, but it is certainly a selective one. With McIvor’s execution and the crushing of the Jacobite rebellion shortly preceding the painting’s unveiling, Waverley’s selection of this whitewashed memorabilia is particularly conspicuous. Unlike William, he has more to repress than the memory of battle, as he must carry the burden of his own pardoning where his former allies received no such leniency. Sutherland underpins this use of art as a means of “bridg[ing] the terrible divide between soldier and civilian”[28], as both Waverley and William utilise creative depictions, rather than solid fact, to communicate their experiences. However, she also acknowledges that Waverley’s painting may bridge the gap, but it does so in a misleading, even immoral, way. According to Bainbridge, the relevancy of art in war is also stressed by Byron in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, as he suggests that the elegiac final stanzas of the first canto “anticipate Byron’s later emphasis on elegy as the mode that can give meaning to war, they also reveal an awakening to the role that poetry and the creative powers might play in response to the loss of war”[29]. Indeed, Byron does not attempt to conceal the brutality of war; as discussed previously, he emphasizes it throughout. However, the “unavailing woe”[30] is accompanied and contrasted by the “Fancy”[31] of the poetic imagination, as a means by which to express and to make sense of loss.

In conclusion, the themes of war and conflict are so crucial in the literature of the early nineteenth century that their treatment can be observed even in those texts which abstain from handling them directly. War forms the central backdrop of *Waverley* and *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*; the former traces a character’s assimilation into armed conflict whilst the latter recounts the narrator’s attempts to escape from its shockwaves. In this sense, they are a clear product of a time period colored by wartime unrest, and are examples of the more clearly evident manifestations of this unrest within the period’s literary movements. However, a reading of Jane Austen’s texts provides a case study for those early nineteenth century literary works which do not offer explicit commentary on war, as her settings initially appear to be particularly untouched by the effects of wider current events. On the contrary, from this reading it can actually be deduced that, in a manner reflecting the reality of the novels’ present day, war and national conflict saturate far more than a nation’s military; they are manifested in the ordinary lives of its people and in the arts produced by these people. These reflections are subtle, but not absent, as war affects characters in indirect but fundamental ways, and comments on war appear in the form of allusions and subtext. Notably, conflict is directly portrayed throughout the

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works of Austen on a personal scale as opposed to a national one. When considered in light of Lukacs's focus on the significance of human nature in the formation of history and, more specifically, its wars, the treatment of 'ordinary conflict' appears to convey ideas about war by generalising the human disposition of belligerency.

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